

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010

Remarks on the Oil Spill in the Gulf of Mexico

May 14, 2010

Good afternoon, everybody. I just finished meeting with some of my Cabinet and administration officials about the ongoing efforts to stop the BP oil spill. And I want to give the American people an update on these efforts, but I also want to underscore the seriousness and urgency of this crisis.

The potential devastation to the Gulf Coast, its economy, and its people require us to continue our relentless efforts to stop the leak and contain the damage. There's already been a loss of life, damage to our coastline, to fish and wildlife, and to the livelihoods of everyone from fishermen to restaurant and hotel owners. I saw firsthand the anger and frustration felt by our neighbors in the Gulf. And let me tell you, it is an anger and frustration that I share as President. And I'm not going to rest or be satisfied until the leak is stopped at the source, the oil in the Gulf is contained and cleaned up, and the people of the Gulf are able to go back to their lives and their livelihoods.

Now, the most important order of business is to stop the leak. I know there have been varying reports over the last few days about how large the leak is, but since no one can get down there in person, we know there is a level of uncertainty. But as Admiral Thad Allen said today, our mobilization and response efforts have always been geared toward the possibility of a catastrophic event. And what really matters is this: There's oil leaking, and we need to stop it, and we need to stop it as soon as possible. With that source being 5,000 feet under the ocean's surface, this has been extremely difficult. But scientists and engineers are currently using the best, most advanced technology that exists to try to stop the flow of oil as quickly as possible.

Our second task has been to contain the spill and protect the Gulf Coast and the people who live there. We are using every available resource to stop the oil from coming ashore. Over 1 million feet of barrier boom have been deployed to hold the oil back. Hundreds of thousands of gallons of dispersant have helped to break up the oil, and about 4 million gallons of oily water have been recovered. Thirteen thousand people have been mobilized to protect the shoreline and its wildlife, as has the National Guard.

This week, we also sent to Congress legislation that would provide us with the additional resources to mitigate the damage caused by this spill. And I ask for prompt action on this legislation. Now, it would help with cleanup efforts, it would provide unemployment assistance and job training to folks whose jobs are affected by this crisis, and it would help with the region's economic recovery. That's why this legislation is important.

It would also help ensure that companies like BP that are responsible for oil spills are the ones that pay for the harm caused by these oil spills, not the taxpayers. This is in addition to the low-interest loans that we've made available to small businesses that are suffering financial losses from the spill.

Let me also say, by the way, a word here about BP and the other companies involved in this mess. I know BP has committed to pay for the response effort, and we will hold them to their obligation. I have to say, though, I did not appreciate what I considered to be a ridiculous spectacle during the congressional hearings into this matter. You had executives of BP and Transocean and Halliburton falling over each other to point the finger of blame at somebody

else. The American people could not have been impressed with that display, and I certainly wasn't.

I understand that there are legal and financial issues involved, and a full investigation will tell us exactly what happened. But it is pretty clear that the system failed and it failed badly. And for that, there is enough responsibility to go around. And all parties should be willing to accept it.

That includes, by the way, the Federal Government. For too long, for a decade or more, there has been a cozy relationship between the oil companies and the Federal agency that permits them to drill. It seems as if permits were too often issued based on little more than assurances of safety from the oil companies. That cannot and will not happen anymore. To borrow an old phrase, we will trust, but we will verify.

Now, from the day he took office as Interior Secretary, Ken Salazar has recognized these problems, and he's worked to solve them. Oftentimes, he has been slammed by the industry, suggesting that somehow these necessary reforms would impede economic growth. Well, as I just told Ken, we are going to keep on going to do what needs to be done.

And so I've asked Secretary Salazar to conduct a top-to-bottom reform of the Minerals Management Service. This week, he announced that the part of the agency which permits oil and gas drilling and collects royalties will be separated from the part of the agency in charge of inspecting the safety of oil rigs and platforms and enforcing the law. That way, there's no conflict of interest, real or perceived.

We've also ordered immediate inspections of all deepwater operations in the Gulf of Mexico. And we've announced that no permits for drilling new wells will go forward until the 30-day safety and environmental review that I requested is completed. We're also closing the loophole that has allowed some oil companies to bypass some critical environmental reviews, and today we're announcing a new examination of the environmental procedures for oil and gas exploration and development.

Now, as I've said before, domestic oil drilling continues to be one part of an overall energy strategy that now includes more clean, renewable energy and energy efficiency than at any other time in our history. But it's absolutely essential that going forward we put in place every necessary safeguard and protection so that a tragedy like this oil spill does not happen again. This is a responsibility that all of us share. The oil companies share it; the manufacturers of this equipment share it; the agencies in the Federal Government in charge of oversight share that responsibility. I will not tolerate more finger-pointing or irresponsibility.

The people of the Gulf Coast need our help, and they deserve nothing less than for us to stand up and do whatever is necessary to stop this spill, prevent further damage, and compensate all those who've been harmed already. That's our job.

It's also our job to make sure this kind of mess doesn't happen again. It's a job we've been doing. It's a job we will keep doing until the well is capped and the spill is cleaned up and all claims are paid.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:13 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House.

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Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Allen, Thad W.; Salazar, Kenneth L.

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